

Return to local driver's license renewals a priority for Senate GOP

BY SARAH LADD AND MCKENNA HORSLEY
KENTUCKY LANTERN

FRANKFORT — Local officials such as sheriffs and county clerks could renew driver's licenses in counties without regional offices under legislation that was filed Tuesday and is a priority in the Kentucky Senate.

The bill comes in response to reports of delays in getting appointments at regional offices, extended wait times and long drives to offices for rural Kentuckians.

Kentucky has 34 regional offices that issue and renew driver's licenses. Drivers would still have to go to a regional office for a new license under this legislation.

Senate Bill 7, sponsored by Shelbyville Republican Sen. Aaron Reed, would allow counties without a regional office to choose one local official to offer license renewal services. Counties with regional offices are "taken care of for now" and would keep all services at those offices, Reed said.

Reed said the legislation would restore "local control" to "local elected officials." SB7 has 28 cosponsors and has been labeled a priority bill by the Senate Republican caucus. Republicans hold a supermajority in both chambers.

"It's the answer to the outcry of Kentuckians from across the state ... people who are sick and tired of long drives, long lines and a broken system," Reed said.

In 2020 a law shifted driver's licensing from circuit court clerks to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, which led to the regional office system. The move helped Kentucky comply with federal requirements to offer Real ID driver's licenses. The Beshear administration said it would provide "greater security of personal identification."

Years later, "you have two basic problems," said cosponsor and Senate Transportation Committee Chair Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon. "In the urban areas, it's hard to get an appointment. In the rural areas, you have to travel, sometimes, a great distance. Those are the issues that Sen. Reed's bill addresses and takes care of."



Sarah Ladd/Kentucky Lantern

Shelbyville Republican Sen. Aaron Reed, left, and Senate Transportation Committee Chair Jimmy Higdon, R-Lebanon, discuss priority legislation that would allow local officials such as sheriffs and county clerks to renew drivers licenses in counties without regional offices in Frankfort on Tuesday.

He is not making a budget request on the bill, Reed said, because it is not a mandatory move for counties. Higdon said there will be a budget request for equipment.

"There's a \$25 convenience fee that goes along with getting your driver's license done in the county," Reed said. "So if you don't want to pay that fee, you can still go to the regional offices, which will still be open." The fees collected will stay in the office conducting the renewals, he said, to offset any expenses.

Gov. Andy Beshear announced last week that he appointed Jeremy Slinker to work as deputy secretary for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, primarily focused on "improving processes at Driver Licensing Regional Offices."

Beshear said Slinker's past experience with the Kentucky State Police, emergency management, Federal Emergency Management Agency and more gives him "the background to root out any wrongdoing."

"There's been significant progress made in driver licensing and developing new processes and being innovative," Slinker said during Beshear's weekly press conference. "But we can always be better. Every day we can be better than yesterday and that's what we're going to strive to do."

Reed said he hadn't seen the news of Slinker's appointment, but "the results of what's gone on in the past kind of speaks for itself. The people of Kentucky have demanded for us to fix this issue."

He said he had not spoken with the Beshear administration "directly" but "I can assure you that they all agree that there

is an issue and this bill will be a great opportunity for them to fix it."

Naitore Djigbenou, a public affairs official in the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, said in an email that the cabinet had lowered wait times at regional licensing centers to an average of 11 minutes in December, down from 49 minutes in April.

"We remain committed to enhancing services and ensuring consistency and compliance across the 35 regional offices we operate," Djigbenou's email stated.

Meanwhile in the House, Rep. Savannah Maddox, R-Dry Ridge filed House Bill 162, which would again give local circuit clerks the duties to issue driver's licenses. Her bill had more than a dozen Republican cosponsors as of Tuesday.

After introducing the legislation last week, Maddox wrote on social media that the "current regional office model has proven to be a significant failure, creating unnecessary burdens for our citizens and undermining the efficiency of a once-effective system."

"For nearly a century, our circuit clerks successfully managed the issuance and renewal of driver's licenses, providing a local, accessible, and reliable service to Kentuckians," Maddox said. "However, the shift to a regional model has led to long wait times, travel hardships, and a lack of accountability. Citizens from across the commonwealth — rural, urban, and suburban alike — are demanding change, and it's our duty to listen."

Kentucky Lantern is a nonprofit news site covering state government and politics.

Moore, Camuel file bills aimed at boosting worker protections in Ky.

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

FRANKFORT — Two Lexington lawmakers have filed a package of bills they say would strengthen worker protections and give local governments more authority to set labor standards tailored to their communities.

Democratic Reps. Adam Moore and Adriel Camuel announced the measures ahead of the 2026 Regular Session of the Kentucky General Assembly, according to a news release.

Moore filed House Bill 344, which would expand home rule by granting cities clearer authority to adopt stronger local labor standards. The bill would allow cities to require project workforce agreements on public construction projects, give preference to contractors that use registered apprenticeship programs, negotiate higher wages for city-funded projects, enact local prevailing wage ordinances, and set higher minimum wages or paid-leave requirements than those required under state or federal law, according to the release.

"Cities should not be blocked from raising standards when their local economies demand it,"



LRC photo

Reps. Adriel Camuel and Adam Moore, both of Lexington Democrats, filed bills to restore worker protections and give communities more flexibility to address workforce needs.

Moore said in the release. He said the bill is intended to give local leaders flexibility to support fair wages, apprenticeship training and workforce development.

Camuel filed two additional measures focused on worker pay and organizing rights. House Bill 345 would reinstate Kentucky's prevailing wage law, which previously required that workers on public construction projects be paid wages reflecting local market standards, according to the release.

She also filed House Bill 346, which would remove statutory language added in 2017 that limits public

employees' rights to organize. Supporters of the bill say those restrictions weakened the ability of public workers to collectively advocate for improved wages and working conditions.

"These bills focus on improving life for working families and making Kentucky more competitive," Camuel said in the release. She said reinstating prevailing wage requirements would help ensure fair pay and higher-quality public projects, while restoring organizing rights would help communities retain skilled workers.

Pursuit ends in more than a dozen charges

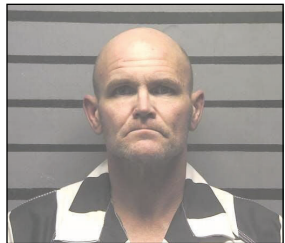
BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

A Madisonville man faces a long list of charges after an attempted traffic stop turned into a lengthy pursuit that ended in his apprehension in Earlington on Monday afternoon.

According to an arrest record released by the Madisonville Police Department, 48-year-old Jason Ray Williams was charged with 14 offenses and booked into the Hopkins County Detention Center. He was held on a \$100,000 bond.

Police said detectives observed a vehicle leaving Chateau Mobile Home Park in Madisonville at approximately 12:59 p.m. and followed it. They believed the driver was Williams, who officers knew had an operator's license suspended for DUI-related reasons.

As the vehicle entered the Dollar General parking lot on North Lee Trover Todd Highway in Earlington, detectives confirmed the driver's identity, the report stated. The vehicle then



HCDC

JASON R. WILLIAMS

abruptly returned to the roadway and approached a railroad crossing at the intersection of Lee Trover Todd Highway and West Main Street. Authorities said the driver drove around lowered crossing arms while a southbound train was approaching.

The agency stated detectives activated emergency equipment and attempted to conduct a traffic stop, but the vehicle fled westbound. The driver then turned the wrong way onto South Atkinson Street.

As the vehicle neared the former Earlington School, the driver attempted to exit the moving vehicle and was struck by it, police said. The individual then ran

into nearby woods but was apprehended by detectives.

During a post-Miranda interview, police said the suspect told investigators there was methamphetamine inside the vehicle. Detectives located a black toolbox containing a large quantity of suspected methamphetamine, suspected marijuana and suspected synthetic drugs, along with a spoon, digital scale and plastic baggies. A defaced handgun was also found near the location where the suspect exited the vehicle, authorities said.

Williams is charged with trafficking in marijuana and synthetic drugs, possession of drug paraphernalia, reckless driving, three counts of first-degree wanton endangerment of a police officer, first-degree fleeing or evading police, second-degree fleeing or evading police, driving on a DUI-suspended license, possession of a handgun by a convicted felon, possession of a defaced firearm, and first-degree possession of methamphetamine.

Agreement creates tolling for I-69 bridge linking Henderson, Evansville

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

The Kentucky Public Transportation Infrastructure Authority approved agreements this week that move the long-planned Interstate 69 bridge project between Henderson and Evansville, Indiana, closer to construction, including the creation of a tolling body required under state law.

The authority approved an interlocal agreement establishing a Tolling Body

for the I-69 Ohio River Crossing and updates to the Bi-State Development Agreement between Kentucky and Indiana, according to a news release from the governor's office.

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Secretary Jim Gray said the actions mark continued progress on a project that has been discussed for decades.

"We are starting the new year with continued momentum for this

transformational project," Gray said in the release. "We are moving toward construction. It's exciting to see a project that has been championed for so many years become a reality."

Gov. Andy Beshear has advocated for the bridge to move forward without tolls, but legislation approved by the Kentucky General Assembly requires tolling as part of the project's financing, the release said. Only the new I-69 bridge

will be tolled.

The newly established Tolling Body will include the chairman of KPTIA, a designee of the chairman, the secretary of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, the commissioner of the Indiana Department of Transportation and a designee of the Indiana commissioner. The group will be responsible for developing tolling policies, including toll rates and business rules, and is

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MCC names Hopkins Co. honor students

BY THE MESSENGER STAFF

Madisonville Community College has announced its Fall 2025 President's List and Dean's List, recognizing students for exceptional academic achievement.

Dr. Cindy Kelley, president of Madisonville Community College, congratulated the honorees.

"We are proud of our students who have earned this recognition," Kelley said. "Their hard work, focus and determination

continue to inspire us."

Students named to the President's List earned a 4.0 grade-point average, while Dean's List honorees earned at least a 3.5 GPA. To qualify for either list, students were required to complete at least 12 credit hours in courses numbered 100 or higher.

Dr. Mary Werner, dean of academic affairs, said the honors reflect students' dedication to their studies.

"It's a privilege to

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